

## Thursday, April 20, 2017 - Day 109 – II Samuel 1-3, Psalm 90, Acts 5

In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the police brought the apostles before the council. They were questioned in what we would see as a courtroom setting. They were asked if they had not been told not to teach in Jesus' name. What would you say if you were asked by the court to stop? Would you say that you were sorry to avoid the punishment and anger of the court? Would you deny that you had been teaching in "His name"?

Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority'. Having been witnesses to Jesus being raised up, how else could they answer? This is the basis of their faith. Psalm 146 tells us "Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save."

How often throughout history have we seen Christ followers who have had the strength of this conviction in the power of the risen Christ? We see a very public pronouncement obeying God over human authority when, during times of armed conflict, people claim conscientious objector status. The U.S. military defines a conscientious objector as someone with "a firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms, by reason of religious training and/or belief." I recently saw the film *Hacksaw Ridge*. It is the true story of a World War Two conscientious objector by the name of Desmond Doss; an American pacifist combat medic who was a Seventh-day Adventist. He refused to carry or use firearms or weapons of any kind. Doss was ridiculed and physically abused during basic training for his religious pacifist stance. In spite of that ridicule, Doss became the first conscientious objector to be awarded the Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor is given for service above and beyond the call of duty. While serving in the Pacific on Okinawa, Doss carried 75 wounded soldiers to safety. He was wounded by gunfire and his actions in combat were nothing short of miraculous.

I once met a monk who was a conscientious objector during WWII, who refused to serve as a medic. He said that serving as a medic would free up another man to serve as a soldier and kill. He chose to serve a prison term rather than go against what he believed were the teachings of Christ Jesus. Imagine the strength of your religious convictions that would lead you to not serve in "the good war" when all of America was either serving or supporting the war effort.

There are other times that we have seen the strength of one's religious convictions take precedence over human authority. I recall that Anabaptists (and many Quakers) refuse to serve in the military. I think of the strength of faith it must have taken to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965 facing police and dogs and fire hoses. I think of Rosa Parks and the faith of those participating in the lunch counter protests. I think of the iconic photograph of a frail Dorothy Day sitting on a chair surrounded by gun-toting police officers.

Where will be called to say 'We must obey God rather than any human authority?' Will it be to protect the rights of our indigenous peoples, to stand with the immigrant, to stand with the marginalized? It takes a strong faith to obey God rather than the powers of man, but that is what we are called to do. Do you have the faith of Peter and the apostles?

By The Rev. Philip Geliebter